

SHORT COMMUNICATIONS

THE MADAGASCAR SQUACCO HERON *ARDEOLA IDAE* IN EAST AFRICA, WITH NOTES ON ITS FIELD IDENTIFICATION The Madagascar Squacco Heron *Ardeola idae* breeds in Madagascar from October to March, afterwards dispersing to the mainland of Africa to spend the non-breeding season in Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda and Zaire, with only a few remaining in Madagascar all year round. Vagrants have been recorded from Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Zambia.

In breeding dress (rarely seen in Africa), the bird is unmistakable in its snow white plumage with sharply contrasting azure blue bill and red feet. However, in its non-breeding and immature plumage, which is generally seen in Africa, it can easily be confused with the Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides*. The following field characters should help to separate the two species in the field.

- a) The streaking on the breast of *idae* is always heavier, darker and broader than in immature and juvenile *ralloides*, while the mantle is much darker (almost a dark chocolate brown) than that of *ralloides*. In addition, *idae* does not show in any plumage the pale biscuit colouring so often present in *ralloides*.
- b) The bill of *idae* is always noticeably heavier and slightly larger than in *ralloides*, though colouration during the non-breeding season is much the same in both species.
- c) In build, *idae* always appears stockier and heavier than *ralloides*, particularly around the head and neck.
- d) In Africa *idae* occasionally shows either pink or red feet (particularly during April, September and October) which *ralloides* does not have outside its breeding colonies.
- e) Whereas *ralloides* is often found in the shelter of reeds and marshes, *idae* is frequently found in open ground and is less prone to seek shelter.

Judging from observations and specimens collected in East Africa, it is clear that the Madagascar Squacco Heron is a regular visitor from May to October with occasional records during April and November (Britton in press), while Prigogine (1976) also reported it as occurring in quite large numbers in Rwanda and Zaire from May to September, with some remaining throughout the year. Although there are no records of it remaining in East Africa during its normal breeding season in Madagascar, there are records from Pemba Island of a male in full breeding dress on 12 October 1942 (Pakenham 1979), and one from Mafia Island on 22 February 1915 in almost complete breeding dress. The Pemba bird would appear to have attained early breeding dress en route to Madagascar, while the Mafia record may well have been an early storm-driven arrival from Madagascar. At present there are no indications that it breeds or has bred anywhere other than in Madagascar.

In recent years, records from Kenya and Tanzania indicate fairly widespread distribution from May to September, with birds recorded from the Selous Game Reserve, Ngorongoro Crater and Serengeti National Park in Tanzania, and from Lake Jipe, Tsavo National Park, Amboseli National Park, Nairobi and the Mwea Rice Scheme near Embu in Kenya. During the return movement to Madagascar birds are regularly recorded along the Kenya and Tanzania coasts from August to October, while the last records are invariably from Mafia Island.

There are few positive records from Uganda, the only recent one being from Rwenzori National Park (M.P.L. Fogden, in litt.). It has undoubtedly been confused there with *ralloides*, which is common and widespread throughout the

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year, but in view of the data given by Prigogine from Rwanda and Zaïre, it quite obviously occurs regularly.

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 PAKENHAM, R.H.W. 1979. *The birds of Zanzibar and Pemba*. London: BOU.
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D.A. Turner, Box 48019, Nairobi

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SYMPATRY OF BLACKSMITH AND SPUR-WINGED PLOVERS *VANELLUS ARMATUS* AND *SPINOSUS* AT AMBOSELI The ranges of the Blacksmith and Spur-winged Plovers *Vanellus armatus* and *V. spinosus* are well known to be broadly allopatric, with a zone of apparent sympatry in parts of northern Tanzania and southern Kenya. Most of this apparent sympatry is undoubtedly due to non-breeding Spur-winged Plovers wandering to the south of their usual breeding grounds. In cases of apparent sympatry of closely related congeners it is interesting to know whether the species concerned are ecologically segregated by each occupying a rather narrower niche in the zone of sympatry than elsewhere, and also whether the sympatry applies to breeding birds.

With regard to ecological segregation I have failed to detect any consistent differences in feeding station or feeding method in places where these two plovers can sometimes be observed together (e.g., on the Wembere in Tanzania, and in Kenya at Amboseli, Lakes Naivasha and Nakuru, and the temporary lake present in 1977-78 near Ngong Rifle Range).

Published data and nest record cards (P.L. Britton, pers. comm.) provide no evidence for breeding sympatry, so it seems worth recording that there is one locality where, at least occasionally, the Spur-winged Plover nests alongside the much more numerous Blacksmith. At Amboseli between 3 and 5 January 1978 I watched a pair of Spur-winged Plovers tending a clutch of two eggs close beside the track which runs along the western shore of the lake-like extension of the swamp near the airstrip. Blacksmith Plovers were also nesting, there being at least one pair with eggs and another with newly hatched chicks, but none showed territorial behaviour in the vicinity of the Spur-winged Plovers' territory.

On 4 January at 11:28 two Blacksmith Plovers flew over the Spur-wings' territory and landed about 30m away. The sitting Spur-wing flew up when it saw the Blacksmiths flying over, and then approached them on the ground in a 'forward threat crouch'; this was ignored by the Blacksmiths, who wandered away. At 12:29 the sitting Spur-wing saw two Blacksmiths behind the nest, went into a 'threat crouch' at the nest and then flew towards the Blacksmith Plovers, landing just in front of them. No display was given by either species but the Blacksmiths flew away. I was surprised by the low level of aggression induced by intruding Blacksmith Plovers, as other waders (Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*, Kittlitz's Sandplover *C. pecuarius*, Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*, Little Stint *Calidris minuta* and Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis*) feeding at the water's edge were attacked with vigour and driven away, although Yellow Wagtails *Motacilla flava* feeding very close to the nest were ignored.

Although the above nest is the only breeding record that I have for Spur-winged Plovers at Amboseli, I saw adult birds (never more than two) at this site on every subsequent visit, the last occasion being 28 October 1979.

J.F. Reynolds, 6 Argyle Road, Bognor Regis, West Sussex PO21 1DY, England
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